

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/21/2023 8:42:54 AM

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Comments: First let me say that I feel that the January 2023 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements Project has a serious flaw that needs to be addressed, and a new round of public participation should be held before any decision is made on the proposed plan. Not doing so could greatly delay the project as a result of a possible lawsuit.

On August 14, 2022, I sent an email to Alaska Regional Planning Director, Monique Nelson and asked her to forward it to Earl Stewart, region Director and whomever else she thought should see it. It said in part:

"I was glad to see that the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements Project will include two new alternatives for the location of the proposed Welcome Center. I felt cheated when I discovered there was only one option offered in the DEIS, especially since I didn't like that option.

However, in spite of the fact that I was not a fan, I would like to congratulate whoever did the artistic rendering of the west side of that proposed building. They did a beautiful job of making rather mundane architecture look very appealing by adding sunset... or "golden hour" as we photographers call it....lighting to the landscape and placing the sunset reflection in the windows.

I hope that the SDEIS will include similarly rendered illustrations of the two new proposed options: the one built into and hopefully on top of the rock adjacent to the Visitor Center and the one that would be located in the area of the current bus parking lot. To do anything but show these options in an equally realistic and artistically appealing way would be unfair to those options and to the public."

So I was extremely disappointed when the January 2023 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement came out. While this version of the EIS did treat the different Welcome Center options more fairly in terms of color and special effects, it still managed to grossly under represent, visually, the two newly proposed buildings in alternative 6 and 7.

A much appreciated addition to the supplemental, a separate booklet labeled "Color Prints" illustrates the point quite well. Figures C-1 through C-6 show six different views of the alternative that would very obviously seem to be the EIS design teams and/or managements favorite Welcome Center from various prominent angles, all of which show nearly all of the building from each particular angle.

Conversely, the alternative 6 Welcome Center is only represented by two illustrations, C-7 and C-8. Furthermore, in these images the building is featured much less prominently than in the Alternative 6 illustrations and only part of the building is visible in each image. And while none of the C- 1 through 6 illustrations show the whole building either, it is never-the-less much easier to piece together a mental image of the whole structure due to both the varying angles and the more prominent representation.

Meanwhile, the preparers of the supplemental evidently thought so little of the alternative 7 Welcome Center, I could not find a single illustration of it in either the Color Prints booklet or the supplement.

Even a quick glance through all these illustration should be enough for any viewer to see how unfairly treated the new alternatives are and how they reflect the bias of the plan design team and/or management.

As part of this complaint, I also object to the fact that large color posters of the proposed alternative 2, 3, &

4, Welcome Center with the beautiful sunset lighting and the sunset reflected in the windows was on prominent display at the January 24 open house at the MGC. The open house was to inform the public about the supplemental and that illustration was not in or a part of the supplemental. Therefore its presence was inappropriate and could have led viewers to decide to support that alternative over the other less visually well represented options.

I strongly believe that the unfair, visual representation of the three alternatives does not meet the spirit of the laws that require Environmental Impact Statements and the public processes that go along with them. The Forest Services' roll is to offer fair, balance, unbiased information, not information that shows your preferences in the best possible light while diminishing the desirability of those you don't want.

Please halt any further work on the January 2023 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement, produce equally fair illustrations of the alternatives and give the public a chance to see and comment on their proposed alternative before you make a final decision on the plan.

#### Welcome Center Location

In my opinion, there are several problems with the planned location of the proposed Welcome Center:

It will eliminate one of my favorite outdoor experiences at the glacier.

Almost every time I visit the Visitor's Center area, the first and often last thing I do is walk over to the pond immediately to the west of the main parking lot (The pond that part of Steep Creek flows through.) in part just to enjoy it's beautiful setting with Mt. McGinnins and Mt. Stroller white as the spectacular background. But I am also checking to see what wildlife might be there. I often see various birds: ducks, ravens, great blue herons, songbirds and bald eagles. Less often, but often enough to be a fun surprise, I might see a beaver or river otter. And when the salmon are running in Steep Creek they sometimes gather in the pool waiting for the right conditions to go further up the creek. Also during that time, sometimes daily, I see black bears traversing the area while going to and coming from their prime fishing grounds. They can also be seen there in the spring when the bears are foraging for fresh greens in nearby meadows.

The Welcome Center as proposed blocks this view for the entire length of the pond and then some. None of the schematics or illustrations of the proposed Welcome Center show any kind of outdoor pathway or observation areas between it and the pond. If it is built as proposed, the only way to see the view of the pond will be to enter the building. This will change the experience from an outdoor one to a much less intimate indoor one. You won't hear the eagles and ravens calling or the songbirds singing. You won't hear the splashing of the salmon or the slapping of the beavers tail. You wont hear bawling of the bear cubs or the wind in the trees. You wont simultaneously enjoy the aroma of budding cottonwoods in the spring or the earthy aroma of fall. In short, it will be a much less impressive experience. And when the Center is closed, so is the view of the pond. This is totally unacceptable.

The location as proposed takes up a huge portion of what little flat land is available at the current main parking lot; land that would be better used as a park-like outdoor grand entrance not a glorified bus depot.

From the parking lot perspective, the first view most visitors will get of the area, the building would blot out much of the view to the west; especially the view of the above mentioned beaver pond and much of the view of Mt. McGinnis and Mt. Stroller White.

Alternately, the Welcome Center could be built on and perhaps into the bedrock hillside in the vicinity of the current parking lot restrooms, similar to the illustration Laurie Craig submitted in her comments. However I would recommend altering her plan to include two or three levels. One or two of them would be cut into the hillside with

one accessible at parking lot level. It would contain the restrooms while the top level would be an observation area at the same level as the Visitor's Center looking out over pretty much everything one can see from the Visitor's Center, from Mt Bullard to the Dredge Lakes area and including the south lake shore and flats; views that will be largely lost if the Center is built down on the flats. The top level would also be a great place for the proposed food service if it is included in the final plan. (Elsewhere in my comments I recommend dropping food service.) Offices and the meeting room could be on the back side of the observation level so that workers would also have a pleasant view, albeit in the opposite direction. Other parts of the facilities could be fit as desired. Having two or three stories in that location would greatly reduce the footprint of the building without blocking any of the prime views.

As the glacier recedes, a hilltop observation area will have more to offer than one built down amongst the ever-growing trees.

The building as proposed is totally lacking in imagination and esthetic appeal.

It's box-like design does not fit into the landscape at all. And while the view of the west side of the building is made somewhat bearable by the simple lines and big windows, the east, parking-lot, side of the building has as much charm as the bus depot it basically is. The building would merely create a huge, ugly wall between arrivers and a significant portion of the landscape.

The adjacent proposed veranda is nothing more than a massive slab of concrete. It should be much more park-like in as natural way as possible.

#### Welcome Center Floor Plan

If the building does end up being built at the currently proposed location, the entire west side of it should be designed with observation of the pond and Mts. McGinnis and Stroller White in mind; with floor to ceiling windows similar to the currently planned observation area. Unfortunately, the way it is currently designed, much of that viewing opportunity has been diminished by smaller windows and for some of the way no windows at all. And astonishingly, much of the prime view has been allocated to offices, an associated meeting room and a retail area. The building should be re-designed to place all of those rooms on the parking lot side of the building; the exact opposite of the way it is currently designed. Eliminating the food service, as mentioned elsewhere in my comments would help facilitate that re-design.

#### Food Service at the proposed Welcome Center

I oppose allowing food service in the proposed Welcome Center for the following reasons:

It would be in direct conflict with the life and death NEED to safely manage bear behavior.

Currently, no food is allowed in the parking lots and parts of the surrounding trails during the bear season. And in the proposed PLAN, some of these areas are labeled NO BEARS ALLOWED EVER. So it's more than ironic that the Forest Service, the agency responsible for the safety of both bears and people, proposes putting a restaurant square in the middle of those areas.

Having a food service will not only tempt people to have food in those areas, it will all but require it. Much, if not all, of the food sold there will undoubtedly be pre-packaged which will mean people will often choose to take it, or their leftovers, with them when they leave. And even though I'm sure the "no food" rule would still be in affect, with an exception made for carrying it back to your bus or car, many people will ignore, forget, or remain unaware of the rule. Consequently food and tasty smelling litter WILL end up on the ground either by accident or through the actions of uncaring people.

To make matters worse, odors from the restaurant, the restaurant's garbage, takeout foods, doggie bags and outdoor garbage receptacles will lure bears into the very areas they are supposedly banned from.

Nothing in the plan addresses how the Forest Service will keep bears away from those areas. This is an issue that needs to be clearly explained before proceeding any further with the plan regardless of whether or not food service is included. Will there be unsightly fences designed to keep bears out? Will you attempt to haze them every time they enter the area? If so how? Will your attempts be passive or aggressive? Will bears be shot? What is the actual likelihood that you can "always" keep the bears out?

Bears currently commonly pass around and through the area of the proposed Welcome Center while going to or coming from various nearby portions of Steep Creek including the mouth of the creek and the nearby "Salmon Viewing Area". Let us not provide an attractant in the area that will distract them from the salmon and other natural foods they currently forage for.

I strongly believe that including any sort of food service would increase the risk of death or injury to both bears and humans.

It would draw even more people to an already over-crowded area. And it would encourage them to stay longer doing something that has little to do with enjoying, appreciating and learning about the natural setting around them. At the same time it would crowd or take space away from people that want to do just that, thereby diminishing their enjoyment of the area.

The space proposed for food service could be put to more appropriate use.

Aside from making the area safer for both bears and people, removing food service from the proposed Welcome Center would allow the size of the building to be reduced by approximately one third, thereby saving cost and creating a substantially smaller footprint on the land and the view. Or alternatively, the additional space could be used to increase opportunities for interpretation and observation both of which are more relevant and appropriate for the area.

It will introduce a substantial new source of bear-attracting and unsightly litter to the area.

Litter from pre-packaged foods and doggie bags will not only be unsightly and require additional cost/effort for clean up, but will also be tainted with the smell of food and act as an attractant to bears.

It is not needed.

There are numerous eating establishments just a five to ten-minute drive away. And the farthest ones are only about twenty-five minutes away.

It will take revenues away from already established businesses.

especially the downtown restaurants and food carts that specifically target tourist.

It's not your Grandpa's coffee shop

Many longtime Juneauites have fond memories of the small, cozy cafe/pie shop that at one time was located in the Mendenhall Glacier visitor's Center. In fact I am one of them. However, if food service is allowed in the proposed new "Welcome Center", it would be a far cry from the quaint eatery that existed when the number of tourists visiting the area was a small fraction of what it is now. It will be attempting, during the tour season, to serve thousands of people per day. The ambiance, service, and quality of food would reflect that. Consequently I think that space in the Welcome Center could be put to better use by adding more indoor observation area and/or for more space for interpretation. Or, the size of the building could be reduced in order to diminish the overall visual impact to the area.

In short, allowing food service would be the source of a number of potential problems, is a waste of space that could be put to better use, and is in direct conflict with the life and death NEED to safely manage bear behavior.

### Motor Boats

No boats should be allowed on the lake; especially ones with petroleum based engines. One merely needs to hang out at any of our harbors for a while to see that petroleum spills are common. And petroleum burning boats are loud. They disturb the serenity for miles in every direction. Please do not introduce this source of petroleum and sound pollution to Mendenhall Lake. And while electric boats are cleaner and quieter, they, similar to petroleum burning boats, will still present an eyesore and their activity will degrade the peacefulness of the lake.

The docks will also be an eyesore and will change for the worst the mostly wild character of the shoreline. I especially object to the one proposed for placement near the Visitors Center just a couple hundred yards from the mouth of Steep Creek. It, and its associated activity will be an eyesore and disturb the peacefulness and character of an area currently used by locals to escape the bustle that surrounds the Visitor's Center and by commercially led groups that currently emerge from the Moraine Ecology Trail onto the shore of the lake right at that spot for their most climatic view of the glacier.

Similarly the dock that would service the proposed Remote Glacier Visitor's Area would also change for the worse the character of an area that is currently relatively wild. The boats that dock there would bring groups of people who are ill prepared and inexperienced into a very dynamic, constantly changing and dangerous landscape and there is nothing in the EIS or plan that I know of that addresses this issue. At the open house at the Visitor's Center on March 15, 2022, I asked two different Forest Service representatives whether or not visitors would be required to stay on the trails or if they would be allowed to wander wherever they wanted. One person said "Yes." They would be required to stay on the trails. The other said "No. they would not be required to stay on the trails. And later at a meeting with stakeholders and three Forest Service representatives I was told "That hasn't been decided yet". The decision about whether or not to have a Remote Glacier Visitor Area should not be made until there is a manage plan in place that dictates how that issue will be resolved.

Furthermore, while the current plan claims that only two motorboats per hour would be used on the lake, there will undoubtedly be intense pressure to allow many more as the years go by, or even by the time the dock facilities get built. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it is easy to envision a nearly constant stream of boats crossing the lake in the near future. Please don't let the genie out of the bottle.

### Lack of Public Hearings

I would like to object to the fact the Forest Service never held a single public hearing throughout the years of this process. In fact I don't recall the last time the Forest Service held a public hearing about anything in the Juneau area. It is my belief that they have chosen this route specifically to limit public comment and the controversy public hearings sometimes create. Instead they have chosen to use "open houses" or other types of information-gathering meetings.

There are major and important distinctions between public hearings and these other types of meetings:

1) In a public hearing, everyone attending hears the exact same information from the designated, responsible Forest Service representatives or their hired consultants. Conversely the responsible government parties and all the rest of the attendees hear the same thing from individuals giving verbal comments. Consequently, everyone goes away with the same information and the same expectations. And assuming a recording and/or transcription is made, everything said becomes a part of public record that can be referred to if there is a dispute about what was said. And the responsible parties can be held accountable.

In the other types of meetings where the attendees are broken up into smaller groups, or visit a series of tables where various parts of a plan are presented, they can, and I believe often do hear very different and sometimes opposing answers to the same questions depending on which table one is at. For example, at the March 15, 2022 open house at the Mendenhall Visitors Center, I purposely asked the same question at two different tables

in order to test that theory. I got two very opposite responses. And later at a meeting between a group of stakeholders and three Forest Service representatives, I got yet a third answer to the same question. This is not a fair or precise method of communicating with the public. And it creates a "he said, she said" situation out of any dispute over what was said. There is no way to prove what was said. There is no official record of the many individual conversations that go on at such meetings.

Open Houses and other such meetings can be useful tools for gathering or dispersing information. But they should be followed up with public hearings that are recorded and or transcribed.

2) As I understand it, currently the only way to be put on the public record and earn the right to officially object to something the Forest Service is proposing, and even it seems for your views to officially be considered regarding a proposal, is to have submitted written comments during the specified comment period. This leaves untold numbers of people out of the process. Not everyone, especially working parents, has the time or energy to prepare written comments. In addition, poorly educated individuals may not have the level of writing skills necessary to prepare them. Others just might not be talented or skilled or patient enough to write. But they may be excellent or at least adequate orators. And they may be able to find a few hours one evening to simply tell the Forest Service what they think. But by eliminating public hearings, the Forest Service now excludes these individuals from a previously accepted, and in my case expected, method of sharing their thoughts.

3) Public hearings perform another important function. They allow members of the public an opportunity to hear each other; to realize there may be different or additional ways of thinking about an issue. Or they may hear facts that they have not previously heard. Consequently they might be inspired to become more passionate; to speak their minds more freely and allow their emotions to show through. Following a public hearing they might even do more research on the issue; learn more about it and perhaps ultimately submit more informed or more heartfelt and complete written comments. In short, more people might become involved, better ideas might evolve and everyone, including Forest Service personnel, might get a better idea of public sentiment.

Unfortunately sometimes emotions can be unpleasant. It's understandable that officials might prefer to avoid them. And in my opinion, this is one of the reasons why the Forest Service has eliminated public hearings. Another reason is the extra work it takes to record and transcribe them. But I think the biggest reason is the fact that the emotions or additional information that come out of a public hearings might spark media coverage and controversy; something any public official would usually prefer to avoid. But both of those things are part of the ingredients of this sausage we call democracy. By avoiding them we turn our backs on the very political system we call our own. A public hearing that is recorded and transcribed is an invaluable part of it.

I can't claim to know what the law requires regarding public hearings, but if it does not require them, then the law needs to be changed. Until then, in the interest of fairness, responsible officials should choose to have them anyway. If it does require them, then the Forest Service should put this whole process on hold until a public hearing can be held and additional time is given for written comments.

**Trials along and behind the lakeshore**

There is no need for 14 foot trails along the lakeshore. The beach along the shore works just fine. A few very low profile bridges would be useful so that cross country skiers or people without rubber boots can use the shoreline without fording the few small creeks that otherwise block progress.

New trails behind the lakeshore would destroy more vegetation and wildlife habitat than they would be worth.